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Universal land ownership, a cure for poverty...

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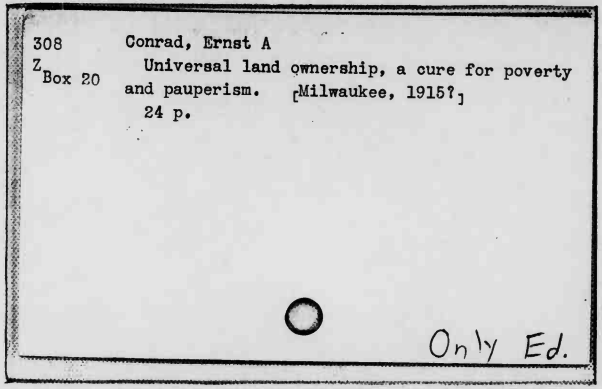

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Universal Land Ownership

A Cure for Poverty and Pauperism

BY
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Universal Land Ownership
A Cure for Poverty and Pauperism

The primeval cause of most of the pauperism and poverty all over the world is the wrong distribution of land, and the retention upon our statute books of most of the medieval laws that govern the ownership of land. Poverty can never be abolished until those laws and principles are abolished which permit one person to own as much land as he can pay for, to the exclusion of every one else, and to leave it to his heirs, who have done nothing to merit its possession.

Poverty and its abolishment, is the most important question that confronts the world, for the reason that far more than one-half of the entire population of this earth are living, and have nearly always been living, in poverty.

With millions of acres of idle lands nearby, there are millions of idle hands, though willing ones, if only the opportunity were given them to work the land. With a fertile and bountiful earth beneath us ready to yield all that is needed for the happiness of its inhabitants, untold millions have hardly any means of subsistence, for no other reason than that our property laws prevent a great army of strong active workers from tilling the soil that lies barren and fallow.

All the measures which some of the more progressive governments have inaugurated, such as employment agencies, old age insurance funds, etc., will never accomplish very much to cure pauperism, because they do not touch the root of the evil. It is necessary to prevent people from becoming so poor that they have to apply to the state for assistance, not to offer them alms after they have become paupers.

The number of poor in this country, or for that matter in nearly every country, is almost beyond belief; for according to the most reliable estimates, 55% of our population have hardly any means, and live absolutely from hand to mouth; they are entirely dependent for their subsistence on their daily labor, and in the frequent periods when they are unemployed part of the time, owing to lack of demand for labor, or are prevented by sickness, or accident, from working, they run into debt, or become the objects of charity.

According to estimates made by Dr. Charles B. Spahr, 1% of our population own over 54% of the entire national wealth; or to put it into other words, 1% of the inhabitants own more wealth than the other 99% put together; 11% of the population own 32% of the wealth; 38% own about 13%; and the balance of the people, or 50% of them, own less than 1% of the national wealth, and are practically propertyless; they own scarcely anything beyond their clothes and a little household furniture and in many cases are in debt for that.

Robert Hunter in his book on "Poverty," estimates, in spite of the fact that the people of the United States are better off financially than those of almost any other country, that ten millions of our population are underfed, underclothed and poorly housed. According to Prof. Richard T. Ely there were in this country in 1891 over three million paupers, who were dependent for their subsistence upon public or private relief, and this number it is believed, has since grown to over 4,000,000. That these conditions are not overstated may be judged by the fact that in 1903 over 60,000 families in New York City were evicted from their homes for their inability to pay their rent, or about 14% of the total number in the borough, while about 10% received pauper burials.

In London it was found by careful investigators that nearly 31% of the people lived in absolute poverty, and that nearly an equally large percentage of the population of the rest of England lived in similar conditions of distress, the total number being placed by Rountree in 1908 at 13 millions, out of a total population at that time of 44 millions.

Spain and Italy are in some respects in even a more lamentable condition, and the abject poverty of the people in Naples was found to be even worse than of those in London.

This momentous question has received the attention of many writers. State socialism has been thought by many to be the panacea for all our social evils, and it would probably in many respects lead to better conditions than those now prevailing. But on the other hand it would largely destroy private initiative, and might easily concentrate the power in the hands of the leaders, fully as much as it is today concentrated in the hands of the rich.

What then is the remedy?

Infinitely the greatest amount of poverty in this country is confined to the cities, and only in those countries where land generally is owned in large tracts, and where in consequence the tenant system prevails, as it does in England, Ireland, Spain and Russia, do we find that an equally large amount of poverty exists in the country districts.

Where land is largely subdivided, and is distributed in small parcels among its inhabitants, poverty disappears. Yet nowhere in the world does this condition prevail anywhere near to its greatest possible extent.

Land and the labor expended upon it, and its products, are the source of all wealth and in order to abolish pauperism, we must recognize the principle and enact it into statutory law, **that every person born into**

this world has an inalienable right to a part of the earth's soil, solely by virtue of his birth.

Here is the remedy and solution of the question of pauperism, and of much of the poverty of every nation, and until it is recognized and applied, poverty and pauperism, and the cost of living, will continue to increase everywhere.

The ownership of a piece of land by every person must be individual, and not in common, and should begin at the legal maturity of the person, be it man or woman. It should be individual because the ownership of lands in common has proved a failure wherever tried, and the sense of individual proprietorship is the greatest incentive to every human being for thrift and effort. There is a certain sense of satisfaction and content produced by the ownership of a piece of land, and especially of one's home, that the ownership of any other species of property does not seem to give.

The piece of land allotted to each person, which would vary in size according to the density of population, and the value and desirability of the land itself, should be inalienable, not subject to sale or to mortgage, or to disposal by gift, not attachable for any debt, or salable for taxes, and should belong to each person under any and all conditions, until his or her death. But it should be exchangeable for another homestead piece, so that the owners could change their residence in case of need or desire.

Under a theory of this kind of a change in our land ownerships there are three principal questions to consider: its justice, its feasibility, and its results; and if these can be satisfactorily answered all the other minor questions may be safely left to the future for adjustment.

ITS JUSTICE.

There is no divine law of ownership, except this one: that all which one creates, or produces, should belong to him, or that he should receive compensation therefor.

Land can not be created; it of course can be improved by the hand of man, and made vastly more valuable than it was in its original state, but no man has an inherent, natural right to own, or control, more than he can personally cultivate or improve, for by so owning or controlling it, he withholds its use from someone else.

The land of this earth of ours, and all of its riches on its surface, and beneath it, belong to all of the people that are born into it, and no one of its inhabitants has a greater right to any part of it than any other one, except for that portion of it which he has himself improved, used and cultivated.

The ownership of land in greater tracts than the individual owner can personally cultivate is incompatible with the best and most productive use of the land, and with its scientific cutivation, and leads to the tenant system, which is as a rule injurious to the land.

Individual ownership and cultivation results in insuring the greatest production from every piece of land, as every effort and all the labor expended by the owner inure to his own benefit. In those communities in which land is most sudivided and to the greatest extent cultivated by the owners, there is a greater degree of welfare, and a higher standard of education, than in those countries where lands are held in large tracts and are tilled by either tenants or laborers in the employ of the owners.

Conspicuous examples of this are found in the Channel Islands, Jersey and Guernsey, where the great majority of landholdings are from two to ten acres, in the

Rhine Provinces of Prussia, and in Westphalia, Baden and Wuertemberg, and most of Switzerland, where the greater portion of the land is divided among small peasant proprietors who own perhaps an average of ten acres each, and of whom it is said that they cultivate their lands almost with the passion of artists, rather than with the plodding spirit of mere bread winners. Similar conditions prevail to a considerable extent in Belgium, Holland and Denmark, France and other parts of Germany, where the subdivision of the land into small tracts under individual ownership has resulted in intense cultivation of the soil, and in consequence the average yield per acre is far in excess of that of England, and those portions of the continent of Europe, where land is owned in large tracts, cultivated principally by either tenants or laborers.

The pitiable condition of Ireland, with its high percentage of pauperism, previous to the land purchase act, was the direct result of the ownership of its land in huge estates by absentee landlords, but since the introduction of that act, its people, formerly tax and debt ridden, and poverty stricken, are accumulating wealth and are rapidly paying for the land they have been enabled to purchase from their former landlords on the installment plan, and the sense of ownership is instilling thrift and energy into them.

The Code Napoleon has made France the rich nation that it is, and all the blood spilled by reason of Napoleon's wars, and the suffering and misery caused by them, has probably been more than balanced by the blessings conferred by the provisions of his famous Code relative to the division of land equally among the heirs of the deceased proprietors. The result of this has been that there are now in France about 7,500,000 or 8,000,000 proprietors of land, of which 5,000,000 own an average of 7½ acres each, while only 50,000 own an average of 750 acres each. About one-third of the soil

of France may be said to be owned by peasants averaging 7½ acres; another third by those averaging 75 acres, and rest by landlords, averaging 750 acres each.

On the other hand, some of the Latin countries, like Spain, parts of Italy, and Mexico, where almost all of the land is owned in large tracts, have an infinitely greater degree of poverty, with its consequent ignorance of the inhabitants. The revolutions in Mexico during the past few years are an attempt by the people to get possession of the land, now principally owned by the followers and favorites of the former President Diaz, or descendants of former Spanish governors and grandees, many of whom held thousands of square miles, while the poor peons are practically the slaves of these landlords. Over three-fourths of Mexico is said to be owned by less than one-half per cent of the population.

The state can not equalize the possession of all, as is proposed under the theory of communism. It is manifestly unfair to appropriate the labor of the skilled and the industrious for the benefit of the lazy or incompetent members of society. But as far as the opportunity of earning one's living from the land is concerned, the state should start out each one who inherits no land or property, alike or as nearly so as is possible.

The cost of living throughout the greater part of the world has risen steadily for many years, and while different causes have contributed to it, the main cause has been the fact that the number of consumers of food products has increased to a much greater extent than the producers of same. The rural population of laborers and tenants has drifted towards the cities to find employment in the factories; if these people were owners of a piece of land they would rarely leave it, but would stay among the ranks of producers.

It may be argued that if agricultural pursuits were profitable more people would be drawn into it. There are several causes which prevent this:

1st. In most of the European states the division of the land into large tracts, which the owners on account of the title under which they hold it, can not sell, or in other cases will not sell, especially not in small parcels.

2nd. In other countries, the United States included, in which the sale and transfer of land in smaller parcels is possible, the facilities to purchase such small tracts on terms of payment which the purchasers could afford to meet, are limited; and even if they are enabled to purchase on easy terms, the necessary payments, in most cases, would absorb all of their available capital and leave them without means to make the needed improvements, or purchase implements and supplies. If they owned the land free from debt they would use what means they had for the purpose of improving the land and become economically independent.

3rd. The large immigration in this country which naturally drifts to the most populous cities, where unskilled laborers find the quickest employment, and which are farthest removed from those agricultural districts where land could be bought cheap and on easy terms; and the lack of knowledge of these people of the localities where desirable tracts could be purchased. Government bureaus disseminating the needed information could be very helpful, even under present conditions.

4th. The attractions of the city against the monotony of farm life;—which must be remedied by village communities in which social life can be made more agreeable, and amusements can be provided.

That individual ownership of a piece of land large enough to be sufficient for earning his livelihood, by every member of the community can only lead to a higher level of citizenship, to the fostering of habits of thrift and economy, to a spirit of self-confidence and independence, to an increase in the education and morality of the people, can hardly be disputed.

It is the poor, the men without property, without a home who furnish the material that drifts slowly but surely into the criminal class, who fill the almshouses, the courts and the jails. The man with a home, be it ever so small, is the supporter of order, of decency, of peace and morality.

The argument that because such a system has never been tried before, it is unreasonable and not feasible, and that existing conditions are but the natural development, is not tenable, as the fact is, that the different countries have entirely different systems of land tenure, and in many cases present conditions are the result of unnatural and forced foundations.

New theories are being constantly developed, tried and adopted, not only in science, but in government, and in the relations between men and nations. The tremendous increase in population, especially in the cities, and the introduction of the factory system by reason of the invention of steam and electric power, have changed conditions throughout the civilized world, and confront us with problems that former generations were not troubled with.

Our greatest industrial and educational development since historical times has occurred within the last hundred years, and innumerable inventions, that were not even dreamt of then, are so influential as to practically control our life to-day.

As long as the country was sparsely populated the individual ownership of large tracts of land proved of no particular harm, as there was plenty of land for everybody, but this has not been the case in Europe for centuries, and even in the United States with its immense expanse, most of the really desirable agricultural lands have passed into private ownerships, and in many instances are either kept out of the market, or are held at very high prices to the distinct detriment of the country at large.

Our homestead and stone and timber acts have in numerous cases been used to acquire for a song some of the richest lands in the United States; our railroads have obtained partly by grants, partly by trickery, many millions of acres which in justice should still be owned by the people, and although in the beginning we started out with the laudable idea of distributing our lands to the people at a low cost, we are today far removed from the principle that the states should be governed and property laws enacted, and land, which is the basis of all wealth, distributed, with the object of providing the greatest good to the greatest number.

ITS FEASIBILITY.

An investigation into the size and the population of the different countries is all that is necessary to dispel any idea that there is not sufficient land to go around, and give each family enough for its comfortable subsistence. In fact the great majority of the countries have far more land than is needed, and much more than, in case of its distribution of all of it, any person could possibly cultivate himself. Taking the world as a whole it will be many centuries, even at the present rate of increase of the population, before all the land could be occupied and cultivated. If we take the several countries singly we will find that Australia has 760 acres for each person of over 21 years of age, Canada 606 acres, the Argentine Republic 312 acres, the United States 40 acres (or exclusive of Alaska 34 acres per adult). If we should figure the average per family of five persons, then Australia would have 2190 acres per family, Canada 1666, Argentine 858, the United States 110, or 93 exclusive of Alaska. In the more thickly populated countries of Europe, Germany would have 4 acres per adult, or 11 acres per family, Great Britain 3 acres per adult and 8¼ acres per family, France 6 acres per adult and 16½ acres per family.

The most densely populated independent countries in the world are Belgium and the Netherlands. Belgium has 11,373 square miles or 7,278,720 acres of land and at the last census a population of 6,693,548 or figuring five persons to a family, which is the general average, approximately 1,338,710 families, which would give about 5 acres to each family, and leave sufficient for the cities, towns and villages, rivers and worthless lands.

The Netherlands contain 12,648 square miles, or over 8,000,000 acres and have a population of 5,263,232, or 1,052,646 families each of which could be provided with nearly 8 acres of land.

But while the amount of available land in the last two cases might be small, it would still be sufficient, and on the other hand there is of course no law of nature which confines men in the ownerships of land to political limits.

Belgium and the Netherlands have immense colonial possessions which could be used to divert their surplus population should that ever be found necessary, and that such a course is not yet imperative is proved by the fact that the emigration from both countries is extremely small.

The difficulties in obtaining sufficient lands in any particular state or community can be easily overcome, and would at the present time affect but a very few of the most densely populated districts, and in these the respective governments can readily make arrangements to offer lands elsewhere, favorably located, and in adequate quantities.

It is of course not proposed that the different countries should divide all their land among their people, but on the contrary, only a sufficient amount to give each family, or each person, enough land to gain a modest livelihood, and it is believed that two or three acres, or at the most five acres per family, is sufficient for that purpose.

But wherever the population of a state or country is so great that there is not sufficient land to give every adult person enough for his subsistence, emigration should be encouraged by the authorities. It is quite likely that but very little encouragement would be needed, for if the principle prevailed of giving land to every one for a homestead, it would probably be found that new, and undeveloped, and underpopulated states or countries would bid for settlers by offering larger holdings to them.

The lands of any country or state not required for homesteads could be privately owned. This refers especially to city property, in which the present ownerships need not be changed; but agricultural lands, privately owned, should always be subject to expropriation by the state for homestead purposes at values to be fairly fixed by impartial appraisers, and such privately owned lands, when not cultivated, should also at all times be subject to sale at a fair appraisal value to any one who will cultivate them. Speculation in lands and withholding them from cultivation by asking high prices for them, should be decidedly discouraged by the government.

Upon the death of the owner of these homesteads, they should revert back to the state, which can grant them, or the privilege of their occupation, to the highest bidder for the improvements that may be upon the land; that is to say, the land itself would be given without cost, but as the former owner will have improved the land with buildings, his heirs are entitled to compensation for them, to the extent of whatever they will bring at public sale. The family of the deceased, or any member thereof could of course bid, and such bids might be given the preference. If there is only one heir the property could descend directly to same.

The question which naturally arises is, how much land is necessary to provide subsistence for a family?

In the first place it must be kept in mind that, while the state should recognize the principle that every adult person has an inherent right in part of the soil, only such portions can possibly be set aside to him, or her, as will not interfere with the equal rights of all, and that the future increase in the population must be provided for as much as practicable.

In the second place the state, or at least the densely populated states, can not confer riches which they do not possess upon the inhabitants, but should prevent absolute poverty to such a degree as lie within their means and their limited territory. Even the unencumbered possession of one acre, or even half an acre, will very materially assist in providing means of subsistence for any one, and it is quite wonderful what an amount of food can be raised upon such an area by intensive cultivation.

It is not expected that the amount of land which densely populated countries can set aside as homesteads for their inhabitants will provide them with all their needs, but the produce they can raise will help in a large degree to keep the wolf from the door. Most of these countries or states will naturally be in northern latitudes, and contain large industrial centers, where the great majority of the people will be employed in factories, and where the wages they earn will furnish probably a good share of the cost of living. With a dense rural population, such as would be the natural result of the great division of land, factories would very frequently be built in the small villages, where labor would probably be cheaper than in the larger cities, and cheap interurban railways would facilitate the daily transportation of large numbers of factory employees from their country homesteads to the village factories.

The American farmer, owing to the general cheapness of the land and its great plenty, has been extremely wasteful and careless in the cultivation of the soil, and

on an average does not obtain anything like the returns from his land that the average European farmer does. And in Europe those countries in which the land is subdivided the most, have invariably the greatest production per acre, frequently irrespective of the productiveness of the soil, as the small owner almost always cultivates his holding much more intensively than the large farmer, and these small farms are moreover cultivated by the owners themselves and their families without paid labor. So we find that wherever land is very much subdivided, as it is for instance in the Channel Islands (Jersey and Guernsey), and in Belgium, to a greater degree than elsewhere in Europe, the price of land and the rent obtained are usually higher than anywhere else.

The average rent, for instance, of agricultural land in Belgium, was, before the war, $8.82 per acre against $4.85 per acre in England, although it is generally admitted that the average quality of the soil of England is better than that of Belgium, and the average price of such land in the latter country has been estimated to be as high as $300 an acre. This is due to the fact that on account of the greater portion of the land being held in small parcels (40 per cent of the cultivated area being in plots of less than 20 acres against 6¼ per cent in Great Britain), the holdings that are offered for sale are usually small, and there is therefore a greater competition for their purchase.

Yet in spite of its high price, land has been difficult to buy in Belgium, for the Belgian peasant is hardly ever a seller of land, but on the contrary is always ready to buy whenever he has any money.

To insure the proper development of small tracts and to make this system a social possibility with reasonable prospects of success, it would of course be necessary for the state to give all possible assistance to the beneficiaries of the system. In this respect we could learn valuable lessons from the example, and the results obtained, in some of the European countries.

A thorough system of agricultural education would have to be established, which should teach improved methods over those now prevailing in this country, especially as to the chemical ingredients of the soil, and the use of proper fertilizers for the different soils, and the different products.

Cheap and rapid means of transportation of passengers and goods, by water and rail should be provided, and either built or controlled by the state, not with a view of realizing a large return upon the capital invested therein, but with a view of merely making them pay their own way, while through their low charges, and adequate service, they would assist, to as great a degree as possible, the agricultural population in the satisfactory development of their properties, and the marketing of their products.

Co-operative societies on an extensive scale should be formed for the purchase of food stuffs, clothing, fertilizer and other necessities, for the insurance of property and of cattle, as well as for the distribution and the marketing of the products of the farm.

Credit banks on the Raffeisen system should be organized and assisted by the credit of the state, or its subdivisions, to provide capital for the building of houses and the purchase of the necessary cattle and machinery. In this respect it is hardly needful to point out that, owing to the smallness of the farms, but little cattle and machinery will be required.

It might be argued that, because of the proposition that these homestead farms should not be salable for taxes, they could not be taxed at all, that there would be no way to enforce their collection, and that therefore the countries and states would be deprived of a large part of their revenues. This would not be the case, for

taxes could be assessed and levied in the same manner as now, but instead of making them collectible from the land, they could be made collectible primarily from the improvements, personal property and crops, and in case there were no such property or crops, and the land was not cultivated, then the state could rent the land, and use as much of the proceeds as would be necessary for the payment of the taxes, returning the balance to the owner, who could re-enter upon it of course at any time, or at least at the end of any year.

It is safe to say that there would be no difficulty whatever in renting such pieces, either by those owners who would not care to cultivate their land, because they might have far more profitable employment elsewhere, or by the state for the purpose of tax collection, for it has been invariably found that, wherever the subdivision of land into small farms has been carried to the greatest extent, as for instance in the countries already mentioned, Belgium and the Channel Islands, and also in the Netherlands and Northern France, the demand for land is much greater than in the countries where lands are held in large tracts as in Great Britain and many of our American States. The reason is obvious. Wherever land holdings are small, the more energetic and industrious of the owners, who have surplus time and capital saved up, are always on the lookout for more land, and are active competitors for any piece that may be in the market.

How much of the land distributed as homesteads would be occupied and cultivated by the people to whom it was given, is a question which of course can not be answered with even an approximate degree of correctness.

But who will doubt that of all the millions who are working in the sweat shops of New York and other large cities, at starvation wages, who are living in close and dingy tenements, poorly lighted and ventilated,

without access to the soil, for which nearly all have an inherent craving, a vast number will not prefer to live in a little cottage and cultivate a few acres of their own, if the land were given to them, and they knew it would be theirs for the terms of their lives, and could not under any circumstances be taken away from them? That, with the assistance of land banks they could obtain the means on easy terms to build a home, and on account of the large number of similar small tracts and the establishment of village communities, the social conditions would be agreeable, measurably more so, at least, than they are now on the large farms? That on account of better means of distribution and marketing of all kinds of farm products, they could obtain fair prices for their produce?

A very considerable number of those living on homesteads would undoubtedly work in nearby factories, leaving the land to be cultivated by their wives and children during such times as they could not take care of it themselves, in the same manner as is done by a large proportion of small farmers in some of the densely populated European states, where cheap and rapid transportation facilities enable a great many of the factory operatives to live on their small farms in the country and yet go daily to their work in the city. In this way the farm would be a source of additional revenue, and at the same time ensure healthful living conditions, and desirable employment for the family.

The introduction of the system would of course be gradual. In states which have considerable uncultivated lands within their borders, a great deal of it, and good land at that, can be obtained at low prices—$5.00 to $20.00 per acre. Most of the Southern and Western States, and some of the Central States, like Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, have millions of acres of desirable wild lands, and in the majority of cases have probably enough of such land to give to every one of its

adult persons who possesses no land at present, say 5 acres, at a total cost which would not be prohibitive, even if it were decided to introduce the system at once and make the distribution within a single year's time. But it would in all probability be far preferable to introduce the system slowly, and not attempt to do it all in less than say 10 years time, in any case, and possibly slower than that where found advisable.

The system of land distribution in this country should, however, not be left to the individual States but should be undertaken by the Federal Government for the United States as a whole, and the constitution should be changed, if necessary, to make this possible.

The beneficiaries of the system should of course all be natural born citizens as it is by reason of their birth in this country that each person has an inherent right to a possession of part of the soil thereof, as in any other country the persons born there have a right to a part thereof.

ITS RESULTS.

From the standpoint of those who will receive the land everybody will admit that this system would be highly desirable. Everyone would have **some** land, even if it was only an acre or two, or even half an acre for that matter, which he could call his own as long as he lived, on which he could raise something as long as he was physically able to do it, and he would never be a pauper.

And would it not be equally desirable from the standpoint of the state, or the community? How many almshouses and poor farms would not be emptied of their inmates, and their physical ability put to proper use and the cost of their upkeep saved to the county, or the municipality? Would not the moral tone of the community be infinitely better if every one of its citizens, man or woman, was an owner of a part of the soil?

Would not all these people be rapidly led to a higher standard of education, to a greater independence of character, of action, of thought, than now when they are either recipients of alms, or mere laborers working from hand to mouth without the hope, in many cases, of ever becoming independent?

And looking at it from the financial side of the ledger of the state, would it not be only a few years before the state would be an actual gainer by **giving** these lands away, after having bought them? Nearly all of our states have millions of acres which lie fallow and are held by land speculators, and which bring comparatively very little revenue in the shape of taxes, as they are in nearly every instance assessed far below the prices the owners are willing to sell them at to settlers.

Distribute these lands among the state's poor after purchasing them from their present owners at a fair value (and to do justice to the state this should not be greater than their assessed value), and within a few years they would be intensely cultivated, and be worth many times their present assessment, and bring a revenue in taxation alone that would be equivalent to a fair rate of interest on what they would have cost the state, aside from the wealth of the produce that would be brought to the owners, and the business it would create in a short time for the railroads, the manufacturers and the wholesale and retail merchants.

Every railroad in the country recognizes the value of the new settler along its lines, and does everything it can to attract him; it wants to transport him, his chattels and his products. Let the state do the work and distribute the wild lands, now idle and practically useless, to those who have none and need them.

From a sociological point of view such a system will not only prove desirable, but will become, before very many years, a practical necessity. Under our present industrial system, our population is being concentrated

more and more into the large cities, and this is true throughout the world. The agricultural districts are being depopulated, or, at least are not growing, because the price of land is either too high to enable the young man, or the new immigrant, to purchase any, even if any land were for sale in such small quantities as he could afford to buy; and if he could, facilities are lacking to enable him to borrow the money to build a home.

The consequence is that our cities are growing too large in every way. The housing problems in all the larger cities are getting more and more serious; too many of the inhabitants, owing to the high rents resultant from the congested conditions, are living in totally inadequate quarters, where they are herded together in rooms which are poorly lighted and ventilated. It would be infinitely better if decentralization could be accomplished.

From a political point of view it is equally necessary. Many large cities have either already passed absolutely into the control of their most undesirable elements, or they are in such condition that these elements can at any time place themselves into possession, for they have a clear voting majority. But make every one of these people a land owner and two things are accomplished: First, a great many will settle on the land and be brought into different surroundings and into a more desirable vocation, and second, the possession of property and its care will eventually change their character and render them a more stable and dependable element in society.

The cost of living, which has been growing constantly during the last 20 or 30 years, will in all probability be reduced under this system of making every adult person a land owner. The number of producers will be very largely increased, and the number of consumers who are not producers, will be correspondingly decreased. All those who will move upon their land and cultivate it,

will be able to raise a considerable portion of the produce which they need, in meat, vegetables, milk, butter, eggs, etc., and will have large quantities to sell to those who rent their lands, and continue to live in the cities.

The American system of farming, and land distribution, has not been conducive to the creation of a large number of small farms. According to the last census of 1910, only 10 per cent of the total area of all lands in farms was divided into farms of under 20 acres; 5.2 per cent of the same total into farms from 20 to 49 acres, and 11.7 per cent into farms from 50 to 99 acres; so that not quite 18 per cent of the total farm acreage consisted of farms of under 100 acres. But it is the small farm which should be encouraged, rather than the large one, as it will call for, and receive, intenser cultivation, and on the average its owner will produce very much more per acre than the owner of the larger farm.

If the United States were to introduce this system, it would require the distribution of land to approximately 32 million persons. Assuming that 55 per cent of the population are adults, or over 21 years of age, we find that out of about 78,000,000 people who were native born, in 1910, about 43,000,000 are over 21 years of age.

According to the 1910 census there were at that time 6,361,500 farms of about 3 acres or more in the United States, of which number, however, only 3,948,722 were owned by the occupants, while about 2,400,000 were in charge of tenants or managers. As practically all of the farmers are married, this means that about 7,896,000 people are already in the possession of a farm. It is safe to assume that over 3 millions are owners of valuable city property so that about 32,000,000 more would have to be provided for. If it were decided to give to each person of over 21 years of age 2½ acres (which would give say 5 acres to each family), it would take 80,000,000 acres to make this distribution, or not quite as much land as is contained in the single State of Montana, or

about as much as in Minnesota and Iowa together. The United States still owns many millions of acres, which are suitable for agricultural purposes and which it could distribute; a number of the states also own large tracts of land which could be used for the same purpose. It may be safely assumed that at least one-half of the land could be taken from the holdings of the government or its subdivisions, but even if all of the land had to be purchased and it were to cost $20 per acre, the total cost would amount to only $1,600,000,000. or considerably less than each of the principal European nations have already voted for the cost of the present war. Every one of the Southern States, south of Mason and Dixon's line, Northern States like Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, as well as the Western States, have millions of acres of excellent agricultural land for sale at $10 per acre and less; even in some of the Eastern States like New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, New Jersey, a great deal of desirable land can be bought at about the same figure, and if the Government and the State lands were used wherever possible, and the other lands judiciously bought, it is possible that at a cost of $500,000,000, every adult person born in this country could be made the possessor of a small piece of land of say 2½ acres, on which he or she could raise a good share of his or her subsistence. When we figure that the annual expense of our government is about double that sum, or a thousand million dollars; that we spend nearly as much for our army, navy and pensions, every single year, that the Panama Canal alone has cost almost that amount, or $400,000,000, (from which we have received hardly any return as yet), it will be seen that the cost would be comparatively little and the returns would be immeasurably great. But cost what it might, it would, from a financial point of view, be the best investment this country, and every other country as well, had ever made, and from every other point of view, it would bring equally large returns.

Summing up the results which are likely to be produced by such a change in the sociological condition of the country, it may be confidently expected that it will make the poor independent, or nearly so; that it will reduce pauperism at least 95 per cent; that it will give work to everyone who is willing and able to work, and will give them the opportunity to work for themselves instead of being at the mercy of others; that it will in time materially change for the better the character of the majority of the people, giving them greater independence of thought and action, and instilling hope and ambition into millions of people, as they will all have some property which they can never lose under any circumstances, and the knowledge of this possession will give them a steady and self-confident character; that it will create throughout the country thrifty and prosperous communities, with an aim towards a higher social life; that it will tend to increase and conserve the natural resources of the soil, and largely increase the efficiency of all persons becoming beneficiaries of the system; that it will solve forever some of our greatest economic and sociological problems, reduce the cost of living, yet increase the purchasing power of the people; that with the increase of the average wealth all commerce will be largely benefitted, and the trade of the railroads, factories and merchants will be vastly augmented.

That the average health of the people in every country which adopts this system will be benefitted as it will bring millions from the crowded cities, and out of the unsanitary tenements, into the country, and will give them opportunity to have better food, fresh air and sunshine, and far more healthful work.

The right kind of charity is to put a man where he needs no charity. Every country in the world, the United States more so than almost any other, has the opportunity under this system to put every man and

woman into a position where they need no charity. Will we do it, or will we continue to let the rich grow richer, and the poor, poorer? Throughout the world, in every clime, in every age, from the earliest dawn of civilization to the present moment, when the greatest conflict that history records is being waged, the struggle of man has been the struggle for property, for land; and the struggle of today in Europe is for land, for possession of land means power; the owner of the land has been the king, the lord, the ruler; the landless man has been the slave, the serf, the laborer. When William, the Norman, conquered England he took possession of the land, and distributed it among his knights, and those became, and some of their descendants remain, the lords of the kingdom, but the pauper of today is the descendant of the landless man of the past, and it is only by exceptional industry that he can purchase his way into the landed class.

All the wealth there is in the world comes from land, and from the labor that is expended on it. Land is limited in its extent, and although there is enough to go around for everyone, the possession by one of more than he can himself cultivate, reduces to some extent the opportunities of others to make a living. When nations form a state, a government of the people, it should be for all the people, and not for a privileged class; the facilities to make every person independent are within the reach of the people; all it needs to make them so, is to give a portion of the land to each one, to be his own as long as he may live and to make it beyond the power of any one else to obtain control of it. Then men will be free to work out their own salvation and to fully enjoy the blessings that they are rightfully heir to.

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